eludamos
Journal for Computer Game Culture
Vol. 4, No. 2 (2010)

http://www.eludamos.org

Really Fake: The Magic Circle, the Mundane Circle, and the Everyday

Joshua Zimmerman

Eludamos. Journal for Computer Game Culture. 2010; 4 (2), p. 237-251

Really Fake: The Magic Circle, the Mundane Circle, and the Everyday

JOSHUA ZIMMERMAN

I put on the bunny hat first, as is my habit. The hat's pink fur contrasts nicely with my blue skin and makes it easier for my friends to locate me in a pile of bodies should the worst happen and I die. I check the rest of my equipment to ensure that it is in good repair, I organize my bags for the coming harvest of riches, and make sure that I have enough food and water for my trip into the wilds. Having completed these preparations, I climb onto my unicorn and thunder across the open plains. Three hours later, I find myself with a small collection of valuable trinkets and, most importantly, a new chair for my house. Redecorating, however, must wait as I have laundry to finish. And so I put away the bunny hat, log off, and go to take care of my chores.

Later that night, I log back on and find a spot for the chair. Instead of fighting dragons or engaging in acts of heroism, I spend time making sure that the color of the couch does not clash with the carpet in the library. In the course of playing this game, *Everquest 2* (Sony Online Entertainment 2004), I have spent literally days working on my virtual home. I have also spent hours completing tasks I rarely attempt in my everyday life: cooking, decorating, and even manually paying the mortgage (in the real world I do so via automatic bank withdrawal). As I think about the boundaries of the virtual and the real, I come to realize that my in-game house is not only part of my real life, but that parts of that virtual home have been thoroughly colonized by the most mundane aspects of my everyday life. Through that colonization by the mundane "stuff" of everyday existence, my virtual life and my everyday life have become more difficult to distinguish from one another.

In this article, I explore various ways that "the magic circle" of game play has become entangled with "the mundane circle" of everyday life. I argue that human beings have begun to move past what Jan Klabbers (2006, p. ix) speaks of when he says, "Games can be designed as images of existing social systems." Society is entering a moment in which games not only contain images of "existing social systems," but also re-configure and re-enact those systems for their own purposes. I set this argument apart from those made about the ways in which computer games become part of everyday life (Pargman and Jacobson 2008; Aarsand 2007) or how the boundaries of play's magic circle might stretch into the realm of pervasive gaming (Montola 2009; Walther 2005). I also differentiate my argument from the work done on Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) such as *I Love Bees* (42 Entertainment 2004) in which actual, physical everyday objects and spaces such as pay phones and parking lots become fantastical under the influence of play (Zumbrun 2009). Instead, I focus on how “the everyday” of the mundane world has been instantiated in the world of *Everquest 2*.

Eludamos Vol. 4, No. 2 (2010)
p. 237-251
Copyright © by Joshua Zimmerman

To begin my exploration, it is necessary to revisit the idea of the magic circle. Johan Huizinga's (1955, p. 10) view of the space of play as "temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart" seems on its surface to perfectly describe my experience of computer game play. Whether logging on to *Everquest 2* or turning on my Xbox to play *Fallout 3* (Bethesda Game Studios 2008), I am taking time out of my day to engage in experiences that are intended to feel distinct from the mundane everyday of real life. Despite the fact that Huizinga's conception resonates with me, however, the usefulness of the metaphor of the magic circle is complicated. Too easily, the idea of a magic circle can create a sense that the space of play is easily definable and locatable. It also suggests that the space of play is stable and controllable, with a hard boundary through which the forces within and without the circle may not pass. Huizinga himself problematizes this interpretation of the circle, though, by noting that cheating or quitting inevitably ends the game as "the whole play-world collapses" (1995, p. 11). Indeed, he adroitly recognizes that humans bring the ability to disrupt the temporary world of play with them into the magic circle.

Despite the problematics of the metaphor, the magic circle is helpful as a visual device. It works as a sort of arbitrary demarcation that defines the movement of the everyday into, through, and out of game space. Inspired by Edward Castranova's statement (2005, p. 7) that “as soon as it [the game] goes online and begins to receive visitors, a synthetic world begins to host ordinary human affairs,” I believe that the idea of a boundary between the game world and the real world might still be engaged with seriously as long as its complications are kept firmly in mind. One complication is particularly important. In Huizinga's definition, play is something that happens inside of a special space. That space is situated inside of the real world—for example, the basketball court in the park or the geographical boundaries for a game of hide and seek.[1] With computer games, however, the most vital part of play does not occur in the real world. While the player manipulates the controller, keyboard, or interface sensors in the real world, that manipulation is secondary to changes the player makes inside of the virtual space. For computer games, the virtual world itself is the site of the circle, the space set apart.[2] My computer may well be the conduit by which I connect to the world of the game, but it is not the world itself. The computer is not host to the ordinary affairs of the game world; the world of the game is. In this world, it is the *mundane* that needs a special space, set apart, in order to exist. This space in the game world is the mundane circle, a place where the fantastical world is pushed back and room is made for the unremarkable and routine.

In an attempt to draw the discussion of the everyday out of the abstract realm of theory, I will now offer some concrete examples through an exploration of the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) *Everquest 2*. Through these examples, I will show that the everyday exists in multiple forms in the game world, all of which help create a space that feels both real and exciting for players, and where the mundane itself becomes a part of play. Additionally, I will show how the transposition and juxtaposition of the fantastical and the mundane serve to break down the boundary between Huizinga's special spaces "dedicated to an act apart" and the so-called "real” world.

Defining the Everyday

While discussing this article with colleagues, I was repeatedly asked the question "So you're writing about *The Sims* (Maxis 2000)?" When I explained that I was not, in fact, I was generally met with disbelieving stares. "Surely," I was asked, "there is no game as concerned with the everyday as *The Sims*?" My colleagues' question is an important one because it deals directly with the issue of what counts as the everyday and what does not. "Everydayness" is a term that applies not only to the stuff of mundanity (brushing teeth, paying bills, making dinner), but also to the institutional forces that circumscribe daily actions (i.e., bus routes, class size caps, work schedules). Everyday life is influenced so pervasively by these forces that they have become nearly invisible. In a game such as *Everquest 2*, the player's behavior is managed by the same sorts of institutional forces through the limitations of the programming, the decisions of developers, and the social force of other players.

The Sims, meanwhile, positions the player as an incredibly powerful manager of an avatar's life. The institutional force of everydayness is blunted sharply by the amount of power the player can exercise in the game. While *The Sims* does get at the stuff of mundanity by allowing players to control an avatar's dwelling, relationships, and even bathroom habits, the game creates a space where the stuff of everydayness becomes fantastical. No longer mundane, the everyday becomes glaringly visible in a way that separates it distinctly from the regular mundane world. The everyday only stays mundane when it is allowed to remain in the background. There must be a point of contrast for the mundane to remain so. In *The Sims*, such a contrast is mostly absent, and thus the mundane loses its transparency and institutional force.

Establishing the Everyday of Play

The transparent and institutional mundane is a good place to begin an exploration of *Everquest* 2, and I will start at the entry gate to Qeynos, my home city in the game. Located on the continent of Antonica, Qeynos contains ports, market places, temples, and the administrative offices of the city government. It also serves as the center of the "good" races of *Everquest 2.* The city is populated by both player characters and non-player characters (NPCs). Player characters are a class of avatar that author Jens Jensen (2001, p. 30) refers to as "virtual humans" or the like that serve as more or less direct extensions of a player's body and will into game space. NPCs, by contrast, are "artificial life" or "Alife." Alife refers to game objects that serve as virtual counterparts to real life flora and fauna, and constitutes one of the most direct ways that mundanity inserts itself into the often fantastical game space. The presence of trees, flowers, and even dogs and cats reinforces the idea that the city of Qeynos is a real place with an existence independent of the player. Players are thus encouraged to see the world of the game as real in much the same sense that their physical hometowns are real.

Figure 1: Qeynosian Alife

The function of Alife in a MMORPG and its role in establishing the everyday of the game is different from other types of games. This is due to differences in the technologies used to produce game worlds. In many (if not most) non-MMORPG games,[3] the virtual world ceases to exist when the player stops playing as the virtual world is maintained by technology that the player has ultimate control over. Consider, for example, *Half-Life* 2 (Valve 2004). When the player turns on the computer and begins to play, the world of the game is called into existence. When the player turns off the computer, the world and its Alife disappear. In a MMORPG, however, the world of the game is maintained on a server that the developer or publisher controls. Even without players, the various forms of Alife that inhabit an MMORPG game world continue to go about their business. The dogs and cats of Qeynos continue to chase each other, the grass and flowers continue to sway in a digital breeze, and the horses in the stables continue to whinny and neigh even with no one around to hear them. The Alife of the MMORPG is not an illusion of everydayness that tricks the player into seeing the world of the game as real, but instead is a reflection of the reality that the game does, in fact, continue without the player's input or even presence.

Jensen's definition of Alife as the virtual counterpart to real life flora and fauna, however, does not adequately express the complex set of functions MMORPG NPCs enact. While NPCs are capable of limited interactions, it is through these interactions that the experience of play is shaped. As a result, NPCs might be better conceptualized in terms of Michel de Certeau's "strategies." In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau defines strategy as "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power . . . can be isolated from an environment," and that this calculus can "serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it" (1984, p xix). In more concrete terms, a strategy is institutional, inflexible, and attempts to determine the rules by which an actor *should* act. A more visual example might be the sidewalks or streets of a city. These paths indicate where a person *should* travel to reach a destination. That a person should travel these particular roads has been determined by the complex interactions of city planners, businesses, governments, neighborhood associations, and other agents.

This institutional force is represented quite literally in *Everquest 2*. Just as someone (or rather, a group of someones) planned the way one street leads to the next in Tucson, Arizona, so too has someone (or a team) decided that one street leads to the next in Qeynos. Additionally, some parts of Qeynos have been set aside for player houses or NPC stores, while other areas have been created to play host to the in-game economy and its associated industries. Spaces are effectively zoned for certain types of living, just like a real world residential neighborhood or a business park would be. Other games take this zoning to a more extreme degree by creating spaces where players are not allowed. Like a military base or police station, these spaces exist in the world of the game, but they are most assuredly not for the use by the public. In *World of Warcraft*, for instance, an area exists above one city, Ironforge, that players refer to as the Ironforge Airfield. This area is inaccessible to most players due to its location, but a few players have discovered ways to overcome the geographic obstacles and make their way to the Airfield. In a comment on the official *World of Warcraft* website, a company representative responded to questions about the Ironforge Airfield by saying, “Heading into an area that is not open will most likely not result in an instant closure of your account, though it is highly recommended that you do not enter such areas as it will most likely result in a penalty if you are caught” (Vrakthris 2007). Other areas in the game, such as Game Master Island, are also off limits to players. Game Master Island even has programmed defenses (The Prison) meant to capture and hold offending players until a Game Master comes to retrieve them (http://www.wowwiki.com/GM_Island 2005). Moreover, these areas are policed by actual humans logging into the game. Considering the millions of players an MMORPG can contain, developers need some other means of enforcing the institutional constraints of the game world.

Policing the everyday of play is a major role of the NPC. Passively, NPCs control player behavior through a set number of responses that limit and direct the course of play. These are the paths a player must follow if his or her goal is to play the game as determined by the developers. My avatar might attempt to dance, flirt, or argue with an NPC instead of simply clicking the provided response button, but without prior programming to enable reactions to those other actions the NPC will not respond. Only by interacting with the NPC in the proscribed way is the player allowed to gain access to the resources the NPC controls (i.e., information, quests, items). By limiting these resources to players who follow the rules, the developers control the flow of play.

This type of control is exemplified by the “access quest.” Various locales in *Everquest 2*, *World of Warcraft*, and other computer games (including non-MMORPGs) can only be accessed when the proper NPC is engaged in the proper way. For example, in order to access the Ward of Elements (a high-level area where players can win desirable equipment) in *Everquest 2*, players must interact with an NPC and perform a series of tasks. Players collect items for the NPC, answer questions based on earlier discussions, and slay a variety of enemies. Some of the tasks are further defined in that they can only be completed at certain times of day. Only by performing the proper actions in the proper order at the proper times can players access the area. Actions apart from the proscribed set offer no benefit at best, and a set back at worst.

NPCs also enforce behaviors in more active ways. Most notably, the guards of Qeynos prevent “evil” players from entering the city. They also work to prevent player characters from attacking NPCs and, in some cases, from fighting with one another. Players who violate the rules have their avatars “killed” by the guards. The everyday of *Everquest 2* is thus established through both the passive and active reinforcement of the game's strategies. Through their policing, the NPCs of Qeynos help establish an everyday of play that allows players to move about the city with a sense of how things are supposed to operate. When players follow the paths set by the strategies of the developer, the everyday of the city is like that of a stereotypically suburban neighborhood, quiet and uneventful.

Figure 2: Qeynosian Guard

Players, however, do not have to follow these strategies. Instead, they can employ "tactics" to shape their own experience of play. As de Certeau notes, an institutional force (the game developer) may produce a set of products (quests, items, and so on) but the developer cannot completely control the ways in which players might put those tools to use (1955 p. xii). The guards of Qeynos, for example, are programmed to protect the city from evil aligned players. In theory, evil players have been barred from the city through this strategy. What has occurred, however, is that elaborate games designed by players have emerged. On my character's home server of Najena, players play a game of "tag" by first entering the city through its sewer system. The players then sneak as close to a guard as possible without being spotted. When spotted, the player attempts to make it back to the sewer entrance without being killed by the guard. More elaborate versions require the player to "aggro" multiple guards in a specific pattern, and flee through the city with an ever growing tail of angry NPCs behind them.

Such a player-created game poses little to no threat to the everyday of play. Indeed, it can even enrich the game world by creating a sense of spontaneity. Player tactics that push too far, however, are often severely punished. As de Certeau notes, a tactic "insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety"(1955 xix). When a tactic seems to pose a serious threat to the structure of play established by developer strategies, it is deemed an exploit. An exploit might involve players using a "glitch" in the geography to render an encounter trivial, deploying an ability or combination of abilities to confuse or break the program of the game itself, or even outright hacking the game. In such cases, the player tactic threatens to overwhelm the strategy, and developers often take direct action either to remove the offending player or to close the hole in the strategy that allowed the tactic to exist in the first place. In this way, the everyday of play (as determined by the developer and supported by the majority of players) is maintained.

Other players play a powerful role in the maintenance or disruption of the everyday of play. For instance, players who use an exploit are often reported to the developer by other players who witness or hear about the transgression. In-game consequences from the developer aside, the harm to a player's reputation can lead to isolation from the larger social network necessary to fully explore many of the game's facets. A player who takes advantage of an exploit or who steals items from other players may eventually find it impossible to locate other players with whom to play. Players who engage in exploits or other bad behavior also often find their infamy has spread far beyond their own server through forums such as "Your Guild Sucks" and "Rate-A-Retard" (EQ2Flames.com 2009). These forums are the basis of a black-list so powerful and pervasive that the developers of *Everquest 2* even offer a "Witness Protection Pack" (purchasable with real money) that allows a character to change his or her name and appearance.

It is the combination of a game's coding (streets, zoning, NPCs, and so forth), active enforcement (Game Masters), and the social force of other players that establishes and maintains the everyday of play. The everyday of play, however, is only one component of the everyday in games. While it instantiates many of the institutional forces that shape life in the real world, it does not account for the large number of items and activities that mimic the most routine parts of real life. To explain this phenomenon, I will now explore a different type of everydayness in computer games, the everyday *as* play.

The Mundane Everyday: Everyday as Play

The influence of the mundane everyday (everyday items and activities drawn primarily from real world life) can be seen most clearly in the player housing available in *Everquest 2.* This housing offers what avatar theorist Robert Schroeder calls "presence" (2002, p. 3), a sense of "being there." *Everquest 2* housing creates that sense by giving players a mundane point of reference in an otherwise fantastical world. It is this infusion of mundanity that allows the player to treat the digital space as if it were a "real" space.

Figure 3: 5 Erollisi Lane

This sense of presence begins first with the creation of a mapable and (seemingly) stable space. My character's home in *Everquest 2* is classified as a five-room "estate" in the city of Qeynos. The property is further situated in virtual space through identification of the city sub-division: South Qeynos. It is situated again inside of South Qeynos through its address: 5 Erollisi Lane. This process of situating the property inside of the space is important, as it reinforces of the sense of presence. It also establishes the virtual home as a *real* house, one that is a house in the same way as a physical structure would be. Real houses typically have addresses, and exist in neighborhoods populated with neighbors. So too does my house in Qeynos. By situating the property in a city, neighborhood, and street, a mundane circle inside of the magic circle is established.

This mundane circle continues to solidify at the front door of the house. Based on the magical rules of the game world, it is not strictly necessary to provide the player with an address or a representation of the front of the house to enter the space. As *Everquest* 2 is a fantasy game, any number of magical transport and access options (magic doors, home recall abilities, and so forth) would be acceptable ways to enter the house. Even with the enormous amount of travel abilities in the game, however, players are not given the option of transporting directly into a home. Instead, they must enter through the front door.

Off my front door is the front room. Here, the fantastical and the mundane are juxtaposed. In the magical world of Norrath (the name of the planet in *Everquest 2*), houses still have rugs on the floor and paintings on the walls. In fact, a player would actively have to avoid certain in-game activities to keep from obtaining these sorts of items. Accordingly, rugs, paintings, and other household items become mundane not only because they resemble real world mundane objects, but because virtually every other player in the game world has identical items. In addition, the acquisition and placement of these items in the home constitutes another strategy of play. In order to advance in the game, there are tasks or quests that require the player either to rent a

home or to acquire items that would be used to decorate one. In this way, the developers encourage the player to see housing and mundane items such as chairs and rugs as parts of play. The mundane everyday becomes the everyday *as* play, and integrated into the developer's visions of the everyday *of* play.

Figure 4: 5 Erollisi Way, Interior

However, the illusion of mundanity is quickly ruptured by the rest of my avatar's home. The fantastical immediately reasserts itself through the presence of my house pet, Visine—a many-tentacled, floating monster with a giant eye and fangs. House pets in *Everquest 2* function in two ways. First, pets encourage players to identify with avatars other than their own. House pets can be named, given simple commands, and even have their size changed by the player. Certain house pets (such as the carnivorous plant) can even be fed. In making these changes, the player begins to identify the character of his or her pet. Is the pet imagined as a sort of fantasy guard dog? Or a lazily floating monster the size of a dachshund? Regardless, he act of choosing asks the player to invest time and attention in the space and the NPCs that inhabit it.

Figure 5: Visine, house pet

Even in the fantastical lies the seed of the mundane, however. This is the house pet's second function: to provide a mundane touchstone for the player. In terms of the traditional goals in an MMORPG (leveling up, gathering stronger weapons and abilities), a house pet offers no benefit. However, by inserting such mundane details as a house pet into the game, the developer is helping the player to more easily establish a sense of presence. Planting these seeds of the mundane in the fantastical creates a space more easily inhabited by players without making the mundane obvious. In this way, the developer actually portrays the everyday as it is in real life: important to the experience, but often hidden in the background.

The presence of the mundane is vital because of the role it plays in the maintenance of the game's fantasy setting. Simply put, fantasy only stays fantastic when it can be juxtaposed with the mundane. Consider the iPod: only a few decades ago, such a device would have been almost inconceivable or at least consigned to the realm of science fiction. Due to its ubiquity now, however, the iPod has become a mundane object for all but the poorest of people. It is, in fact, so mundane that for some it has become invisible. Instead of clutching the rare and wondrous technology close, an owner can inadvertently leave it at Starbuck's and not realize for hours. Through its ubiquity, the object has lost its fantastical nature. The fantasy world of a game is no different. After traveling across Norrath often enough, the floating islands and dark monsters no longer seem so spectacular. One strategy to combat this phenomenon is to provide players with a refuge of mundanity inside the game world: the mundane circle of player housing. In effect, player housing becomes a mundane island in the fantastical sea of the game world.

Figure 6: Altar Area

Players, however, may attempt to reject and resist this strategy. Unlike the tactics employed by players in the everyday of play, this resistance faces almost no strategic limits. In the upstairs of my own in-game home, for example, there are no end tables or the like to speak of. Instead, I have used common, in-game items to create a more fantastical space. On a small plot of land in the room there is an altar for my character's deity, with grassy knolls, swirling lights, and butterflies. It is a space meant to feel wondrous, and in creating it I attempted to convert everyday objects into fantastical ones. Likewise, there trees inside my home, and small bushes. These are not trees with garish colors, nor do they drop magical fruit; they are simply trees with branches and leaves—Alife. By grouping these mundane objects with more fantastic items, I have tried to impart a sense of the fantastical to the trees as well. Like a series of virtual Matryoskha dolls, the fantastical world of Norrath contains my small island of near mundanity, which itself contains a small plot of the fantastical world.

For this mundane island to survive in the fantastical world, it must be maintained. The most direct way is through paying the rent. Players can complete quests or slay enemies to acquire currency and status points, both of which can be used to pay the rent on a home. Players can also take part in the large player-run economy of the game to gain income. If the rent is not paid on time, the player loses access to his or her home until the account is paid. Whether players choose adventuring or business, they are in an unenviable but understandable position: to enjoy the mundane virtual oasis, they must work for it. Because playing the game outside of the developer's strategies denies the player access to game resources, playing the game in accordance with these strategies has essentially become the player's job, which is necessary to maintain the chairs and paintings and house pets collected while playing the game. In this way, the institutional force of the everyday of play turns mundane activities and objects into a part of play, the everyday as play.

The Meaning of Everydayness

If the institutional force of the everyday is mimicked in the virtual world of the game, what does it matter? It matters because the presence of the everyday in computer games can change the player's relationship and reasons for playing. If I play a computer game to escape, what am I escaping if the game world requires me to do what I do in the real world? When the mundane has come to colonize the virtual world so thoroughly, can I indeed call it a space set aside for an "act apart"? For now, I believe that I can. My real life still does not involve much dragon slaying. However, the presence of the mundane in computer games highlights how vague the boundaries between the real and virtual have become, and how unimportant they might be in the future. The virtual world of a computer game may soon be as much for living as it is for playing (if that is not the case already).

That said, game worlds have already become vital realities for players. While my real world home is certainly less fantastic than 5 Erollisi Way, I find that the separation between the two spaces is not clear in my mind. Both feel like they are mine; both feel like my private space. And I am not alone: many players feel this way about their real and virtual homes. What this means, for gamers now and the rest of the world soon, is that one must be able to think critically and carefully about how such spaces are not only played in, but lived in. The day where most of my life (including the everyday activities that help to maintain my real life) occur in a digital world is likely not far in the future. When that happens, which "me" is the real one? The physical body? The digital body? If I begin to identify the house in Qeynos as home more so than my real home, which one *is* my home? Perhaps that binary is itself the problem. Perhaps I must consider the spaces I inhabit (both physical and digital) as "real," as spaces where the ineffable quality of personhood can exist, for better or worse.

Part of the challenge will be to see where in these digital spaces the overlap of magic and mundane is total, and in which places it only *seems* total. It is important to note that the everyday of play enacts as many of the same strategic limitations on players as the real world. Institutional forces can still work to constrain and repress individual and collective action. In the virtual world, however, the player's ability to resist or subvert such strategies is even more dubious than in the real world. By allowing players space for token resistance, virtual worlds offer a possible route for institutional forces to subvert and diffuse truly revolutionary action. One simply has look to social media such as Facebook to see a litany of causes where many users have "signed up" but where little action actually takes place. MMORPGs offer an even more insidious version of this phenomenon by creating space where meaningful social action might be simulated. The player's action makes little difference in the real world, but the player is led to believe that he or she has taken meaningful action in the game world. Instead of fleeing from the virtual space as a remedy, it might be more effective to increase the flow of the mundane into the virtual world to create a place in which digital action might carry the same sort of power that protest in the real world carries. Considering the ways that virtual worlds affect the material conditions of peoples' lives already (their jobs, their families, and so on), it is not hard to imagine a time when just such a world will exist.

Ultimately, the presence of the everyday in computer games provides multiple avenues for future exploration. The mundane and the fantastic certainly reinforce and

refresh each other, but the presence of the mundane world in play inevitably seems to lead to a game space in which living is more important than playing. The presence of the mundane, in fact, calls into question whether one is playing at all, as the "space apart" becomes all of a piece with the real world, and the special rules of the game become like the rules of the real world. It might be, in the end, that the mundane circle represents not just a space for the mundane to exist in the virtual world, but an egg waiting to crack open and birth a new everyday life composed of the virtual and the real but completely owned by neither. Such a hybrid world surely opens new vistas for both scholarly and playful exploration.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the anonymous reviewers at *Eludamos* for their insightful feedback and guidance. Special thanks also to Dr. Amy Kimme Hea and Dr. Maribel Alvarez for helping me explore these ideas.

Games cited

42 Entertainment (2004) *I Love Bees*. 42 Entertainment (ARG).

Bethesda Game Studios (2008) *Fallout 3*. Bethesda Softworks (Xbox 360).

Blizzard Entertainment (2004) *World of Warcraft*. Blizzard Entertainment (PC).

Maxis (2000) *The Sims.* Electronic Arts (PC).

Nintendo EAD (2005) *Animal Crossing: Wild World*. Nintendo of America (Nintendo DS).

Sony Online Entertainment (2004) *Everquest 2.* Sony Online Entertainment (PC). Sony

Valve Corporation (2004) *Half-Life 2.* Vivendi Universal Games (PC).

References

Aarsand, P. (2007) Around the screen: Computer activities in children's everyday lives. PhD thesis, Linköping University. Available at: http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:23606 [Accessed: 8 March 2009].

Arsenault, D. and B. Perron. (2009) In the Frame of the Magic Cycle: The Circle(s) of Gameplay. In Perron, B. and Wolf, M. J. P. (eds) *The video game theory reader 2.* New York: Routledge, p. 109-132.

Castranova, E. (2005) Synthetic worlds: The business and culture of online games. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

de Certeau, M. (1984) *The practice of everyday life.* Trans. Steven Rendall. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

EQ2 Flames.com (2010). [Online]. Available at: http://www.eq2flames.com/ [Accessed: 2 July 2010].

Huizinga, J. (1955) Homo ludens. a study of the play element in culture. Boston: Beacon Press.

Jensen, J. (2001) Virtual Inhabited 3D Worlds: Interactivity and Interaction Between

Avatars, Autonomous Agents and Users. In Qvortrup, L. (ed.) *Virtual interaction: Interaction in virtual inhabited 3D worlds.* Denmark: Springer, p. 23-47.

Klabbers, J. (2006) The magic circle: Principles of gaming & simulation. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Pargman, D. and P. Jakobsson (2008). "Do You Believe in Magic?: Computer Games in Everyday Life*." European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 225-244.

McGonigal, J. (2003). A Real Little Game: The Performance of Belief in Pervasive Play. *Avantgame* [Online]. Available at: http://www.avantgame.com/MCGONIGAL%20A%20Real%20Little%20Game%20DiGRA%202003.pdf [Accessed: 14 March 2009].

Montola, M. (2005) "Exploring the Edge of the Magic Circle: Defining Pervasive Games," Presented at *DAC* 2005 conference. [Online] Available at: http://users.tkk.fi/~mmontola/exploringtheedge.pdf [Accessed: 12 March 2009].

Schroeder, R. (2002) Social Interaction in Virtual Environments: Key Issues, Common Themes, and a Framework for Research. In Schroeder, R (ed.) *The social life of avatars: Presence and interaction in shared virtual environments.* London: Springer-Verlag, p. 1-18.

Vrakthris. (2007) Re: Ironforge Airfield. [Online] *World of Warcraft Forum*. Available at: http://forums.worldofwarcraft.com/thread.html?topicId=2509265119&sid=1&pageNo=1 [Accessed: 3 July 2010].

Walther, B. K. (2005) Atomic Actions – Molecular Experience: Theory of Pervasive Gaming*. Computers in Entertainment*, vol. 3, issue 3 [Online]. Available at: http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1077258& [Accessed: 14 March 2009].

WoWWiki (2005). GM Island. [Online]. Available at: http://www.wowwiki.com/GM_Island [Accessed: 3 July 2010].

Zumbrun, J. (2009) Mystery Movie Teaser has Gamers Seeking Alternate Reality. *The Washington Post*. 26 July 2007 [Online]*.* Available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-

dyn/content/article/2007/07/25/AR2007072502272_pf.html [Accessed: 01 May 2009].

Notes

1 My use of the world “real” in relation to the physical world should in no way be construed as a statement that the virtual world is not real. For the sake of easy reading, however, I will be using “real world” in reference to the physical world.

2 Technologies such as the Wii or Kinect present an interesting permutation of the circle, but they are outside the scope of this article. In the cases of these technologies, I would argue that play occurs both inside and outside of the virtual world, and that both are vital to the experience of play.

3 Games such as Animal Crossing: Wild World (Nintendo 2005) do continue to "play" even when the player is not logged in. In such cases, however, the world of the game as the player experiences it does not exist when the player is gone. Instead, the game is "playing" by moving data about. In contrast, games such as Everquest 2 and World of Warcraft continue to render Alife without the player's presence.